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Evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) was created in 1947 to confront the devastation in Europe left in the wake of the Second World War. With the breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in the 1990s, its membership expanded by one third, and it currently serves an economically varied group of 56 member States from Europe, North America and Asia.

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) examined the relevance and effectiveness of ECE and the extent to which it is fit for purpose to support member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The evaluation was conducted using surveys, interviews, on-site visits, case studies, direct observation, document reviews and secondary data analyses.

ECE has effectively facilitated the establishment of critical conventions, regulations, norms and standards that have had both regional and global impact, by providing a neutral space for experts from its member countries and beyond to negotiate, discuss and generate useful, concrete products. Those products have included legally binding conventions in the transport and environment sectors and hundreds of standards, classifications and recommendations in such diverse areas as statistics, public-private partnerships, trade, housing, forestry and energy. ECE provides a platform for decision makers to discuss policy, and a variety of ECE processes involve the provision of policy advice.

In order to achieve those results, ECE has navigated the extensive intergovernmental machinery effectively, but it has been challenged by the demands placed on its secretariat role and faces the risk of losing its institutional memory in

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playing that role. Servicing such a large number of bodies in distinct and highly specialized areas has also affected the ECE secretariat's ability to be more flexible, particularly with regard to working across sectors and subprogrammes. ECE has also faced competing and, at times, conflicting member State demands and priorities stemming in part from different economic needs and historical and geopolitical trends.

While many ECE products have been adopted and have been useful in non-member countries, ECE lacks a common understanding of and clear strategy on its global reach beyond its regional role.

Since the 1990s, ECE has also assumed a larger role in providing technical assistance to countries with economies in transition in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. It has adequately targeted the countries most in need in the region; however, its funding for and focus on technical cooperation has been low and dispersed.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a critical opportunity for ECE to examine how its activities under existing norms, standards, conventions and related review mechanisms and statistical work can contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. ECE has already taken concrete steps to do so, including identifying and mapping relevant activities, surveying member States and holding discussions within sectoral committees. While ECE has the necessary expertise to support member States, particularly with regard to monitoring frameworks in the context of environmental conventions and in peer reviews as part of country assessments, it faces several issues as it moves forward. They include weak intersectoral collaboration, expanded workloads and the need to enhance partnerships, particularly with the private sector and civil society.

OIOS makes five important recommendations to ECE:

- Develop and operationalize a knowledge management strategy
- Conduct a mapping of intersectoral and interdivisional initiatives and activities
- Develop a proposal, for presentation to the Executive Committee, that explores the nature of its global focus
- Examine how its activities under existing norms, standards, conventions and related review mechanisms and statistical work can contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals
- Undertake the mapping of existing partnerships and cooperation with non-State actors and develop specific proposals for expanding and strengthening such cooperation in support of the Sustainable Development Goals

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I. Introduction and objective

1. The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) identified the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) for evaluation on the basis of a risk assessment undertaken by OIOS to identify Secretariat programme evaluation priorities. The Committee for Programme and Coordination selected the programme evaluation of ECE for consideration at its fifty-seventh session, in June 2017 (see A/70/16). The General Assembly endorsed the selection in its resolution 70/8.

2. The general frame of reference for OIOS is set out in General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B, 54/244 and 59/272, as well as Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/273, which confers on OIOS the authority to initiate, carry out and report on any action that it considers necessary to fulfil its responsibilities. OIOS evaluation is provided for in regulation 7.1 of the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (ST/SGB/2016/6).

3. The overall evaluation objective was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance and effectiveness of the work of ECE and the extent to which it is prepared to support member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The evaluation topic emerged from a programme-level risk assessment described in detail in the evaluation inception paper.[1] The evaluation has been conducted in conformity with the norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group.

4. The ECE secretariat management's comments on the draft report were sought and taken into account in the preparation of the final report. The formal ECE response is included in the annex.

II. Background

Mandate, governance and organizational structure

5. ECE was created on 28 March 1947 by Economic and Social Council resolution 36 (IV) to support post-war reconstruction and promote the integration and economic cooperation of European countries. At the outset, ECE was composed of 18 member States from Europe, and the United States of America. In the next 30 years, Canada, Cyprus and 13 more European countries joined the organization, and between 1991 and 1995 membership increased by 21 more countries from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Two further additions in the past 15 years brought the final count to 56 member States. ECE membership is diverse, spanning countries with very high, high and medium human development.[2]

[1] OIOS/Inspection and Evaluation Division, Inception paper: programme evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe (IED-16-003), 26 June 2015.

[2] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Country profiles, Human development reports. Available from http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries.

6. The main objective of ECE is to pursue sustainable development and regional cooperation and integration through three interrelated functions:[3]

(a) Policy dialogue, which provides a neutral platform for dialogue on economic, social and environmental issues;

(b) Normative work, which facilitates the development and negotiation of new norms, standards and conventions;

(c) Technical cooperation, which promotes the integration of member countries into the world economy.

7. ECE is governed by its terms of reference and rules of procedure (E/ECE/778/Rev.5), revised in 2009. It is governed by the Economic Commission for Europe, which meets biennially. Between those sessions, review and guidance of the intergovernmental sectoral committees and implementation of the ECE secretariat work programme are carried out on behalf of the Commission by the Executive Committee.

8. Eight sectoral committees act as governing bodies for the eight ECE subprogrammes.[4] The ECE secretariat services the committees, as well as their subsidiary bodies. The eight committees are as follows:

(a) Inland Transport Committee;

(b) Committee on Environmental Policy;

(c) Conference of European Statisticians;

(d) Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry;

(e) Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships;

(f) Committee on Sustainable Energy;

(g) Committee on Housing and Land Management;

(h) Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards.

9. During the period 2014-2015, ECE had 313 staff members. It comprises the Office of the Executive Secretary and eight substantive subprogrammes implemented by six divisions, as shown in table 1.

Table 1
Subprogrammes and divisions in ECE

Subprogramme	*Division*
Environment	Environment Division
Transport	Sustainable Transport Division
Statistics	Statistical Division

[3] See A/68/6 (Sect. 20) and A/70/6 (Sect. 20).
[4] Environmental and transport conventions have their own governing bodies.

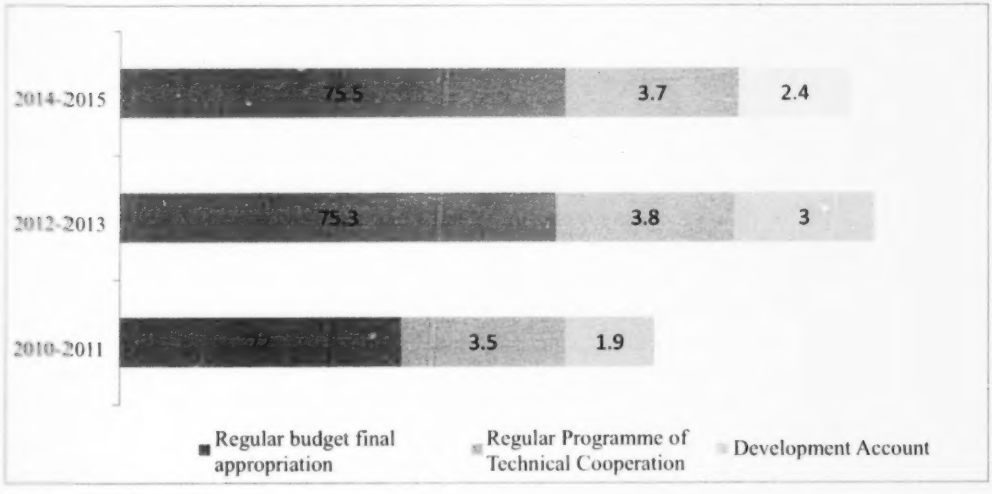
Subprogramme	*Division*
Sustainable energy	Sustainable Energy Division
Housing and land management	Forest, Land and Housing Division
Forestry and timber	
Economic cooperation and integration	Economic Cooperation and Trade Division
Trade	

Source: ECE website.

Resources

10. The projected resources of ECE for 2014-2015 amounted to $81.6 million, with 92 per cent coming from the regular budget. This represents a decrease in total planned resources from the previous biennium, attributable to decreases of 20 per cent and 2.6 per cent in the Development Account and the Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation, respectively. Figure I shows planned resources for the past three bienniums.

Figure I
ECE biennium budgets, 2010-2015
(Millions of United States dollars)



Source: ECE.

III. Methodology

11. The time frame for the evaluation was primarily the period 2012-2015. Selected data and information from earlier years were also reviewed to support the analysis of particular thematic issues.

12. All evaluation results are based on a triangulation of multiple data sources collected through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, including:

(a) Document review: review of key documents, including strategic frameworks; budgets and programme documents; Executive Committee meeting minutes; sectoral committee meeting reports; technical cooperation project documents; audit and evaluation documents; and documents related to the 2030 Agenda;

(b) Interviews: 87 semi-structured interviews with a non-random sample of ECE management and staff; representatives of member States and partner organizations, including other United Nations entities; intergovernmental organizations; the European Commission; and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD);

(c) Surveys: three self-administered web-based surveys of sectoral committee members, member States and ECE staff;[5]

(d) Direct observation of two Executive Committee meetings by videoconference in October and November 2015; an annual session of a sectoral committee (Committee on Environmental Policy) in Geneva in October 2015; and the Economic Forum and the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia in Tajikistan in November 2015;

(e) Case studies: in-depth studies of nine ECE areas of work.[6] OIOS based its selection on predefined criteria[7] and in consultation with the relevant ECE divisions. Each case study included a variety of data collection methods, including interviews with government representatives, members of committees and/or working groups and other individuals from the private sector or civil society; short surveys of relevant stakeholders; focused e-mail questionnaires; and document reviews;

[5] OIOS conducted the surveys in September and October 2015. The staff survey was sent to all 313 Professional and General Service staff, consultants and interns. A total of 176 responded, a 56 per cent response rate. The sectoral committee survey was sent to 464 current members of the eight sectoral committees. A total of 100 responded, a 24 per cent response rate. The survey of member States was sent to 56 Geneva-based missions and the European Union. Eight responded, a 14 per cent response rate.

[6] One from each ECE subprogramme (two from Transport) were selected as case studies. The areas were: air pollution; road safety; inland water transport; sustainable housing and real estate markets; data, monitoring and assessment to influence policy dialogue in forestry; innovation and competitiveness; gas; trade facilitation and electronic business; and social and demographic statistics. Case study analyses were integrated into the evaluation results as an additional source of evidence.

[7] Case study selection criteria included coverage of all subprogrammes, resources, substantial work to date, global and regional focus and observation of meetings.

(f) Missions to ECE headquarters in Geneva; the European Union headquarters in Brussels; the offices of OECD and other international organizations in Paris; and the tenth session of the Governing Council of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, held in Dushanbe.

13. The collection of evaluation data was limited by the low response rate of the member State survey.

14. OIOS consulted the ECE secretariat during the conduct of the evaluation and expresses its gratitude to the secretariat for its cooperation and assistance.

IV. Evaluation results

A. ECE has effectively facilitated the establishment of critical conventions, norms and standards that have had a regional and global impact

ECE has effectively supported the negotiation of legally binding instruments and the development of standards

15. Since its creation, ECE has played a key role in the negotiation of 74 legally binding international instruments[8] in transport (58) and the environment (16). It facilitated the development of hundreds of voluntary standards, classifications, action plans and recommendations, as shown in table 2.

Table 2
ECE outputs, by subprogramme, 1948-2016

Subprogramme	*Output*	*Examples*	*Number*
Legally binding conventions, agreements and protocols			
Environment	Convention	Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution	5
Environment	Protocol	Protocol to the 1979 Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution on Persistent Organic Pollutants	11
Transport	Convention	Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (TIR Convention)	
Transport	Agreement	Agreement concerning the Adoption of Uniform Technical Prescriptions for Wheeled Vehicles, Equipment and Parts which can be Fitted and/or be Used on Wheeled Vehicles and the Conditions for Reciprocal Recognition of Approvals Granted on the Basis of these Prescriptions	58

[8] These include conventions, protocols and agreements but not the 136 legally binding vehicle regulations annexed to the Agreement concerning the Adoption of Uniform Technical Prescriptions for Wheeled Vehicles, Equipment and Parts which can be Fitted and/or be Used on Wheeled Vehicles and the Conditions for Reciprocal Recognition of Approvals Granted on the Basis of these Prescriptions.

Subprogramme	*Output*	*Examples*	*Number*
Non-legally binding standards, classifications, action plans and recommendations			
Statistics	Standard	Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics	>30
Trade		Standard concerning the marketing and commercial quality control of apples	>100
Economic cooperation and integration		Standard on public-private partnerships in health-care policy	9
Transport	Classification	Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals	1
Sustainable energy		United Nations Framework Classification for Fossil Energy and Mineral Reserves and Resources	1
Forestry and timber	Action plan	Rovaniemi Action Plan for the Forest Sector in a Green Economy	1
Housing		Geneva Charter on Sustainable Housing	1
Sustainable energy	Recommendation	Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) and CCS for Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR) in a Post-Kyoto Protocol Agreement	15
Trade		Code for the Representation of Names of Countries (recommendation No. 3)	40
Sustainable energy	Best practice	Best Practice Guidance for Effective Methane Drainage and Use in Coal Mines	1

Source: ECE, Compendium of legal instruments, norms and standards, 2015.

16. ECE is recognized positively in playing this important role. In surveys, 82 per cent of sectoral committee members and 88 per cent of staff rated ECE as effective in helping to develop standards and technical recommendations. Similarly, 72 per cent of sectoral committee members and 81 per cent of staff rated ECE as effective in the development of legally binding regulations, standards and technical recommendations. All eight member State representatives who responded to the survey concurred that ECE was successful in helping to negotiate legally binding instruments.

ECE has also been effective in servicing conventions

17. ECE has significant experience in the servicing and administration of legally binding conventions, which require sustaining a network of convention bodies, such as implementation committees and working groups; organizing meetings and sessions; preparing documents, agendas and reports; and collecting information and disseminating it to participants. Servicing conventions has meant ensuring that legal instruments evolve and stay up to date and seeking further ratifications when appropriate, which are crucial to maintaining their relevance.

18. The need to ensure that legal instruments stay up to date is particularly important in the environment and in transport, two spheres where scientific and technical advances compelled adjustments to agreements negotiated years or decades earlier. In the environment, this has taken the form of protocols to conventions, or "soft law" voluntary recommendations and resolutions based on

new developments and good practices. For example, the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution was originally signed in 1979, but since then ECE has facilitated the negotiation of additional protocols addressing the emissions of eight specific air pollutants. In transport, for example, the Working Party on Road Traffic Safety and the World Forum for the Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations continued to update conventions negotiated decades ago. With regard to vehicle regulations, there have been 136 new such regulations since the Agreement concerning the Adoption of Uniform Technical Prescriptions for Wheeled Vehicles, Equipment and Parts which can be Fitted and/or be Used on Wheeled Vehicles and the Conditions for Reciprocal Recognition of Approvals Granted on the Basis of these Prescriptions. Those regulations have addressed issues that evolve over time, such as automotive brakes or safety belts.

19. Keeping conventions relevant also involves obtaining new ratifications, which has been challenging. In 2014-2015, ECE achieved its target of new ratifications for two out of six conventions or protocols.[9] In the environment, for example, ECE multilateral environmental agreements reached a peak of new ratifications in 2009, but the trend has been declining in subsequent years (ECE/CEP/2014/16, para. 86).

ECE conventions have contributed to positive impacts in global public health and safety, democracy and cross-border trade

20. Table 3 shows examples of ECE conventions that resulted in positive global outcomes.

Table 3
Examples of positive global outcomes resulting from ECE conventions

Convention	*Positive outcome*
Agreement concerning the Adoption of Uniform Technical Prescriptions for Wheeled Vehicles, Equipment and Parts which can be Fitted and/or be Used on Wheeled Vehicles and the Conditions for Reciprocal Recognition of Approvals Granted on the Basis of these Prescriptions	Enhanced safety for car occupants and pedestrians; reduced emission and fuel consumption from vehicles
TIR Convention	More efficient cross-border trade
Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention)	Enhanced public access to environmental information

[9] OIOS analysis based on targets in the biennial performance plan of the Environment subprogramme for 2014-2015 (ECE/CEP/2014/4) and the updated list of ratifications in http://treaties.un.org.

Convention	*Positive outcome*
Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution[a]	Reductions of airborne emissions in the ECE region

Sources: Aurélie Slechten and Vincenzo Verardi, "Measuring the impact of multiple air-pollution agreements on global CO_2 emissions", Economics Working Paper Series, No. 2014/010 (Lancaster, United Kingdom, Lancaster University Management School, 2014); Kareen el-Beyrouty and Andrew Tessler, "Economic and competitiveness gains from the adoption of best practices in intermodal maritime and road transport in the Americas: the TIR system as an example of a best practice", October 2014; report of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment (A/HRC/31/53).

[a] The ECE region has seen decreasing emissions in the range of 18-70 per cent.

21. In the wider scheme of international legal frameworks, ECE conventions and agreements influenced other regional and global instruments, such as European Union directives. In the environment, the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) influenced the Water Framework Directive of the European Union.[10] In transport, the European Agreements concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road and by Inland Waterways were integrated into the European Union directive on the inland transport of dangerous goods, and the rules set out by those Agreements were extended to national transport operations in all European Union member countries.[11] Environmental conventions have inspired the normative content of such international instruments as the 1998 Aarhus Protocol on Heavy Metals, which influenced the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

22. With the exception of environmental conventions, ECE does not systematically monitor and report on the use and impacts of its conventions, norms and standards. It adopts an informal approach to communicating to the general public the ways in which its work affects the daily life of citizens in a section on its website entitled "How we impact your daily life".

The use of ECE non-legally binding products was generally high

23. ECE voluntary products, such as standards, classifications, action plans, charters and recommendations, are public goods that member States and non-State actors can use if they find them valuable. Overall, 73 per cent of sectoral committee member survey respondents indicated that in the past five years their country had used one of those ECE products. The case studies provided examples of products used, including the Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide, the Rovaniemi Action Plan and the Consolidated Resolution on Road Traffic. In the context of the statistics case study, all seven national officials from national statistics offices confirmed that their country had used the Recommendations for the Censuses of Population and Housing.

[10] David Blundell, "The influence of Aarhus on domestic and European Union law: access to information", February 2013.

[11] Directive 2008/68/EC (5).

B. ECE technical cooperation projects support normative work and, for the most part, appropriately targeted countries in need; however, they are concentrated in one subprogramme

Overall technical cooperation supports ECE normative work, but project budgets are concentrated in the environment

24. ECE technical cooperation activities aim to improve the capacity of Governments to implement ECE legal instruments, norms, standards and regulations as set out in the ECE Technical Cooperation Strategy (E/ECE/1447/Add.2). An OIOS review of 56 technical cooperation projects in the period from 2006 to 2015[12] confirmed that a majority (38 of 56) of projects broadly supported the development or implementation of the ECE normative framework. A subset of those projects (21) made a direct link with a specific ECE convention, norm or standard. This is particularly the case in the environment, where, out of 17 projects, 13 supported the implementation of one of the ECE environmental conventions or protocols.

25. The environment subprogramme commanded a majority of technical cooperation extrabudgetary expenditures (69 per cent), while other subprogrammes, such as housing and energy, accounted for approximately 2 per cent each. The variety of thematic areas covered by ECE, and its limited technical cooperation budget, implied a wide dispersal of funds and many projects with a smaller budget. Of 56 projects reviewed, 41 per cent had a budget of $100,000 or less. For example, agricultural quality standards, numbering more than 100, had one technical cooperation project in support of their implementation. A review of data from the Integrated Monitoring and Document Information System showed that 7 per cent of ECE outputs and 16 per cent of ECE staff work-months were devoted to technical cooperation in 2014-2015.

ECE technical cooperation had, for the most part, appropriately targeted the less developed transition economies in the region

26. The ECE target countries for technical cooperation are "transition economies".[13] Within transition economies, there is a wide range of economic development.[14] The review of information on projects and activities funded from extrabudgetary resources and provided on the project monitoring tool revealed that the majority had focused on the group of transition, non-European Union countries.[15] As shown in table 4, the four less developed countries of the ECE region[16] were among those most often serviced by ECE technical cooperation activities. ECE states that its technical cooperation is demand driven,[17] which might explain why Belarus and Kazakhstan, which are not among the poorest, were the

[12] All projects with start or end dates between 2010 and 2015 in the ECE project monitoring tool were included in the analysis. The review comprised all extrabudgetary projects appearing in the ECE project monitoring tool with a technical cooperation project form.

[13] Transition economies are those moving from a central planning to a market economy. 25 ECE members fall under the category.

[14] Eleven transition economies joined the European Union.

[15] One support project was to a non-transition country.

[16] Based on UNDP and World Bank rankings.

[17] See E/ECE/1447/Add.2.

countries most often targeted. In comparison, other countries in the low- to middle-income bracket, such as Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine, were less represented in ECE technical cooperation projects. Most committee members and staff surveyed (78 per cent and 84 per cent, respectively) indicated that ECE had targeted the countries most in need in the region.

Table 4

Countries with ECE technical cooperation projects, 2006-2017

Country	Number of technical cooperation projects	Human development index[a]	World Bank income ranking[b]
Belarus	12	High human development	Upper middle income
Kazakhstan	11	High human development	Upper middle income
Kyrgyzstan	11	**Medium human development**	**Low middle income**
Tajikistan	10	**Medium human development**	**Low middle income**
Turkmenistan	9	Medium human development	Upper middle income
Azerbaijan	8	High human development	Upper middle income
Republic of Moldova	8	**Medium human development**	**Low middle income**
Uzbekistan	8	**Medium human development**	**Low middle income**
Georgia	6	High human development	Low middle income
Armenia	5	High human development	Low middle income
Russian Federation	5	High human development	Upper middle income
Ukraine	4	High human development	Low middle income

Source: ECE project monitoring tool.

Note: A country was included if it was mentioned specifically in the project form.

[a] See http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi.

[b] See http://data.worldbank.org/news/new-country-classifications-2015.

27. ECE contributes to the United Nations Development Assistance Framework in all 17 countries in the ECE region.

C. ECE has been effective in convening technical experts for its intergovernmental platforms but is challenged by the demands placed on its secretariat role and the risk of losing institutional memory

ECE has successfully summoned relevant technical expertise to develop its key outputs, effectively navigating the extensive secretariat machinery in the process

28. ECE has effectively facilitated the development of critical norms, standards and conventions through its ability to convene and guide discussions of global

experts and guide their decisions on the sectors in which it works. Some of the expert committees that it services have existed for more than 50 years, and ECE has acquired a rich history of institutional knowledge and expertise in their work. Servicing committees is one of the major activities of ECE, and it generally does so very effectively. In the 2014-2015 biennium, it produced 1,224 parliamentary documents and serviced 1,772 meetings, which represents the second-largest volume of secretariat services in the United Nations Secretariat.[18] Furthermore, as noted in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/70/677-E/2016/48), for 2010-2014, a large majority (81 per cent) of ECE outputs consisted of documents and meetings serviced.

29. Overall, members of sectoral committees rated ECE highly in its performance of its secretariat role. A large majority of respondents to the sectoral committee survey (89 per cent) rated the secretariat support provided by ECE as excellent or good. More specifically, a majority (80 per cent or more) rated that support excellent or good with regard to the quality and timeliness of information provided, the responsiveness of staff and the servicing of meetings.

30. OIOS observed efficient servicing of meetings of the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia as two examples of ECE secretariat work. During those meetings, ECE secretariat staff presented papers to facilitate discussion, responded to questions and neutrally guided some points in the discussion. This was observed during two meetings of the Executive Committee, at which ECE staff were responsive to the needs of Committee members.

31. More in-depth case study analyses of ECE work with a sample of experts revealed satisfaction among committee members. In the Conference of European Statisticians, all eight stakeholders interviewed rated ECE effectiveness highly in that role. Similarly, all eight noted that a relatively small team from the Statistical Division managed the work of the Conference and its working groups and task forces in a timely and high-quality manner. In the Working Party on Road Traffic Safety of the Inland Transport Committee, two thirds of the members interviewed commended the relevance of the work of ECE in supporting the expert group, noting that it was the only permanent intergovernmental body dealing with that important issue. Members of the Committee on Sustainable Energy also noted that, on gas, ECE does an excellent job in facilitating member State access to pools of expert knowledge on the topic.

32. ECE risks losing its strong capacity to service those expert committees if the institutional knowledge and lessons for doing so are not captured and shared within the organization. ECE staff members tend to stay with the organization for a relatively long period of time, on average more than 10 years, thus accumulating significant experience. Some 13 per cent of ECE staff are expected to retire within the next five years, including nearly all of its senior leadership. OIOS could not identify any systematic knowledge management mechanism for capturing, storing, sharing and integrating knowledge and lessons on how ECE does its work. Less

[18] The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights produced the largest volume.

than half of ECE staff survey respondents (40 per cent) stated that ECE was effective in integrating lessons learned into programme planning.

The need for ECE to service numerous thematic committees has placed heavy demands on its staff and hindered cross-sectoral collaboration

33. The significant demands placed on ECE staff by servicing committees, combined with the need to work in such distinct and highly specialized bodies, have been perceived by staff as negatively affecting their ability to be more innovative and flexible, as well as their ability to work across sectors and subprogrammes. Table 5 shows that ECE supports 218 bodies, including 31 convention bodies, 50 subsidiary bodies and 137 expert bodies.

Table 5
Number of intergovernmental bodies supported by ECE

Subprogramme	*Committee/convention governing body*	*Subsidiary body/ working party*	*Group of experts/team of specialists/task force*
Environment	11	23	27
Transport	13	22	55
Statistics	1	–	11
Sustainable energy	1	–	6
Housing and Land Management	1	2	1
Forestry and Timber	1	1	8
Economic Cooperation and Integration	1	–	3
Trade	2	2	26
Total	**31**	**50**	**137**

Source: ECE.

34. There exist some examples of intersectoral work, such as the long-standing Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme and the ECE Joint Task Force on Energy Efficiency Standards in Buildings. In technical cooperation, a review of 56 projects revealed only 2 that referred to intersectoral work.[19] A review of annual reports covering the period from 2010 to 2015 from three committees, namely the Inland Transport Committee, the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Conference of European Statisticians, and observation of the Committee on Environmental Policy revealed limited reference to cross-sectoral activities, except for the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators.[20] Furthermore, less than half of ECE staff survey respondents (34 per cent) rated ECE as effective in promoting linkages between subprogrammes, and nearly half (46 per cent) volunteered that better coordination and cohesion between divisions was needed for ECE to increase its effectiveness. In interviews, some staff members also stated that divisions

[19] The For Future Inland Transport Systems (ForFITS) Tool represents an effort on the part of the Sustainable Transport, Environment and Statistical Divisions to support more informed decisions about CO2 emissions in the transport sector.

[20] Environment and statistics.

operated as silos with limited interaction and synergies between them. Staff also identified weak intersectoral collaboration as the principal challenge that ECE would face in supporting member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

D. ECE has effectively provided a neutral platform for dialogue and decision-making but faces competing and, at times, conflicting member State demands and priorities

ECE has provided a neutral platform for dialogue between member countries with different economic systems and development levels

35. During its first decades of existence, ECE provided a forum in which member countries from two opposite economic and political systems met, engaged in dialogue and produced concrete technical outputs. That convening function endures, and at present ECE offers a neutral platform for member States with different levels of economic development to discuss and reach decisions on common issues. In interviews, member States, partners and staff overwhelmingly highlighted the ability of ECE to span such a wide range of geographical and developmental differences among its member countries as one of the main comparative advantages of the organization. Representatives from three multilateral organizations interviewed considered ECE as particularly strong in its knowledge of the context and challenges of the countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

While the general work programme of ECE is steered by member States, the diversity in its membership has resulted in perspectives and priorities that were competing at times

36. Member States define the general direction of the organization, as well as its specific work programme. OIOS observation of proceedings of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, the Committee on Environmental Policy and the Executive Committee showed that member States were invested in the discussions and that their presence was strong and their representatives vocal. However, within that context, member States have had differing perspectives on the main focus of ECE, and it has been faced with the challenge of responding to divergent member State interests that stem in part from different economic needs, as well as historical and geopolitical trends. Following the ECE review process and in the context of budget cuts in 2011-2012, countries attempted to protect and promote the work areas that they considered most important, determined largely by their levels of economic development and/or their membership in other subregional entities. For the 28 member countries that are also members of the European Union, the value of ECE has been viewed primarily as being in its work in the environment, transport and statistics sectors. For non-European Union member countries, particularly those that are not yet members of the World Trade Organization, ECE work has been considered most critical in economic cooperation, innovation and trade. Furthermore, in interviews with member State representatives, some believed that ECE should limit its focus to the facilitation of norms and standards, while others encouraged ECE to work beyond that and into the policy realm. Some staff members interviewed also noted the challenge of working effectively in the context

of the political tensions that occasionally pervaded intergovernmental deliberations. Such competing demands have at times resulted in a lack of clarity and direction as to where to focus ECE resources.

37. A review of Executive Committee meeting minutes[21] also showed an increasing trend over the past five years of extensive member State involvement in project approval, including the allocation of resources and procedural matters. A very detailed level of engagement on the part of member States in project review and approval was also observed during the two Executive Committee meetings attended by the OIOS team. In interviews with representatives of eight member States, representatives reported that the high level of member State engagement was useful for ensuring the implementation of member State decisions and supervision of financial management. In contrast, other member State representatives and several partners and staff interviewed perceived the high degree of member State involvement to be overly demanding, particularly in view of a heavy secretariat workload.

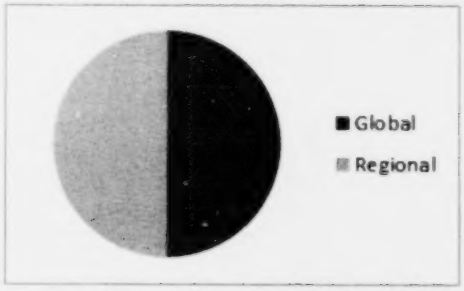
E. ECE lacks a common understanding of and clear strategy on its global reach beyond its regional role

Numerous ECE conventions, norms and standards are global[22]

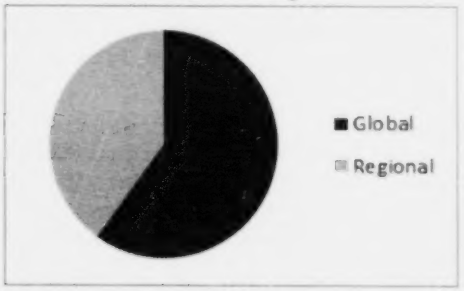
38. As shown in figure II, more than half of ECE conventions in transport and the environment extend beyond the ECE region. The Water Convention was opened to non-member countries for ratification in 2015, and four countries have started national processes towards accession.

Figure II
ECE transport and environment conventions

29 of 58 ECE
transport conventions are global



3 of 5 ECE
environment conventions are global



Source: ECE, Compendium of legal instruments, norms and standards, 2015

[21] OIOS conducted a review of 46 Executive Committee Chairman's conclusions from 2010 to 2015.

[22] OIOS deemed conventions global if they were acceded to or used by at least one non-member country.

39. Many of the ECE non-legally binding outputs are also global. Some recommendations, initially developed in the context of the ECE region, have been subsequently adopted worldwide, such as the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. Furthermore, there are 40 ECE trade recommendations, which aim to facilitate international transactions and are relevant beyond the ECE region. ECE also recently began facilitating the process of developing standards on public-private partnerships, meant to be practical to any country exploring different modalities of financing for public services.

Non-member States also participated in ECE committees and subsidiary bodies

40. Table 6 shows that, in 2015, countries outside the ECE region participated in five of the eight sectoral committees. That participation also extended to subsidiary bodies of the sectoral committees. For example, of the six expert groups of the Committee on Sustainable Energy, four included non-member countries as participants, and in trade, non-member countries participated in the two working parties in 2015.

41. In statistics, the Conference of European Statisticians, despite its name, has included a number of countries outside the ECE region as active participants, including two non-member countries on its Bureau.[23] In transport, the World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations has included the active participation of more than 20 countries outside the ECE region. A representative interviewed from an active non-member country, voicing a common view, stated that participation in the Conference was an opportunity to be exposed to innovative thinking, tools and methodologies on statistics.

Table 6
Attendance by non-member countries in committee sessions in 2015[24]

Sectoral committee	*Attendance by a non-member country?*	*Number of attendees*
Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships	Yes	17
Inland Transport Committee	Yes	13[a]
Conference of European Statisticians	Yes	9
Committee on Sustainable Energy	Yes	3
Committee on Environmental Policy	Yes	1
Committee on Housing and Land Management	No	–
Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry	No	–
Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards	No	–

Source: Attendance reports of sectoral committee sessions.

[a] The session of the Committee held in February 2016 included attendees from 23 participating non-member countries.

[23] Mexico and New Zealand.

[24] The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business, which also reports to the Executive Committee, includes the participation of non-member countries.

ECE also engaged in capacity-building and technical cooperation in non-member countries

42. The global nature of many of its legal instruments has also resulted in ECE technical cooperation and capacity-building activities outside the ECE region. In 2014, five of the eight subprogrammes reported such an activity. While they were limited, for the most part, to advisory missions or workshops, they nevertheless included a more substantial endeavour with the first environmental performance review conducted outside the ECE region, in Morocco.[25]

The extent and nature of ECE global work has not been deliberate

43. There is no formal document discussing in which areas and to what degree ECE should pursue the globalization of its work. As described above, non-member countries have used ECE standards, acceded to its conventions, participated in its committees and working groups and benefited from its technical cooperation, is a testimony to the value ascribed to ECE work by non-member countries. Accordingly, more than half of member State representatives, partners and staff interviewed (34 out of 59)[26] believed that ECE should actively pursue the globalization of its work. Some of the reasons offered were that in many cases the nature of ECE work was already global and that all countries, not only those in the region, could benefit from ECE products.

44. Another 20 interviewees also expressed overall support for the globalization of ECE products but cautioned that this had implications, such as expanding activities and services without having the appropriate resources or capacity to support a more global clientele. For example, staff expressed how a global reach of norms, standards and conventions had produced a rise in the number of requests from non-member countries for technical support, which ECE, for the most part, could not cover. Finally, a small number of interviewees (5 of 59) indicated that ECE should not pursue global work, as that would risk undermining its identity as a regional organization.

F. ECE has been proactive in seeking to support its member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development but faces challenges in fully optimizing its role

ECE has taken concrete steps to move forward with its support to member States within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

45. During its Commission session in April 2015, and in the run-up to the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, held in September 2015, ECE discussed the opportunity presented by the upcoming agenda and reflected on how its strengths could potentially be harnessed to support the new global goals (see E/ECE/1473 and E/ECE/1474). This culminated in the endorsement by member countries of a high-level statement succinctly identifying

[25] ECE technical cooperation activities 2014 annual report; observation of Committee on Environmental Policy proceedings.

[26] Of 87 interviewees, 59 offered an opinion on the subject.

ECE work in each of the sectoral areas that could be useful in supporting the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (E/ECE/1475).

46. As shown in table 7, in 2015, six sectoral committees, with the support of the ECE secretariat, addressed the development agenda in their discussions at their 2015 annual meetings. The ECE secretariat facilitated informative sessions for some of the committees, while for others it produced presentations and papers to elicit debate on the future engagement of their committee with the goals.

Table 7
Initiatives and discussions on the Sustainable Development Goals in sectoral committees, 2015

Sectoral committee	*Initiative/discussion*
Inland Transport Committee, February 2015	• Informative session on transport within the Sustainable Development Goals framework • Request by the Committee to monitor the inclusion of transport priorities in the Sustainable Development Goals framework • Informal document: "Transport for sustainable development: the case of inland transport", jointly prepared by the five regional commissions
Conference of European Statisticians, June 2015	• Session on monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level • Session on cooperation in monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals • Adoption of the declaration on the role of national statistical offices in measuring and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals (ECE/CES/89/Add.1) • Future development of a road map for the development of official statistics for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals
Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships, September 2015	• High-level substantive segment on innovation, competitiveness and public-private partnerships and their essential role in the Sustainable Development Goals • Presentation from the task force of the Business Advisory Board on public-private partnerships of ways of contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals
Committee on Environmental Policy, October 2015	• Presentation by the secretariat on the role of environmental conventions in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals • Information paper on environmental agreements and global goals

Sectoral committee	*Initiative/discussion*
Committee on Sustainable Energy	• Focus on pathways to sustainable energy
Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry, November 2015	• Two workshops and expert meetings on forest-related Sustainable Development Goals
Committee on Housing and Land Management, December 2015	• Informative session on general aspects of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal indicators • Decision to develop a system for monitoring Sustainable Development Goal 11

Source: OIOS review of the sectoral committee session reports.

47. After the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, ECE continued to be proactive in defining its place within the Sustainable Development Goals architecture. This included a mapping exercise, which indicated that it was involved in 16 of the 17 Goals, and the launch, together with the Regional United Nations Development Group Team for Europe and Central Asia, of a survey of member States[27] to seek feedback on their plans for integration of the Goals into their national strategies and reporting mechanisms. The draft ECE strategic framework for the period 2018-2019 integrated the 2030 Agenda as its overarching objective.

48. Furthermore, at the time of writing, ECE was consulting with member States on the possible creation of a regional forum for review and follow-up on the Sustainable Development Goals. Regional forums, envisaged in General Assembly resolution 67/290 in the context of creating the high-level political forum, would straddle national and global review mechanisms and include other relevant regional entities. In the 2030 Agenda follow-up and review architecture currently being discussed, the regional commissions are considered well placed for collecting and consolidating follow-up information from member States, as well as entities outside the United Nations system, including other regional public and private institutions.[28]

ECE has the necessary expertise to support member States in specific elements of the 2030 Agenda

49. At the end of 2015, ECE identified how best to utilize its expertise to contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The first step involved adjusting indicators and improving the statistical capacity of selected member States; the second involved supporting member countries in review and follow-up using existing tools and mechanisms; and the third involved helping member countries to translate the Goals to specific standards and legal instruments.

[27] Survey results are expected in March 2016.

[28] Report of the Secretary-General on critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level (advance copy).

50. A majority of member States, partners and staff interviewed who discussed this topic (44 of 76) also noted how ECE was well placed to assist member States with implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. Some stated that the strength of ECE would be in helping countries with the review and follow-up of the Goals, in particular by using already existing tools, such as country assessments that integrated peer review mechanisms.[29] Some also stressed the importance of strengthening member countries' statistical capacity and suggested that ECE help with regionalizing indicators. Still others stated that conventions and standards were useful tools to help countries to implement specific thematic areas of the 2030 Agenda.

ECE faces three issues as it moves to support the 2030 Agenda

51. To best support member States in implementing and monitoring the 2030 Agenda, ECE must address three key issues. The first entails the need to strengthen coordination among its different sectoral areas and subprogrammes, as well as the linkages between its functions, as discussed in paragraph 34 above. In interviews with partners, member States and staff, this was the most frequently cited issue that ECE needed to address in order to best support member States with the 2030 Agenda. The second issue, noted primarily by ECE staff surveyed and interviewed, was the inevitable expanded workload from ECE involvement in the Sustainable Development Goals. Even if support is provided primarily through already existing instruments, structures and tools, one third of the staff interviewed volunteered that this would burden an already overstretched staff.

52. The final issue identified by partners and staff was the need to further improve engagement with partners, particularly those outside the United Nations system, such as the private sector. ECE was generally perceived positively by partners interviewed: 22 of 29 characterized ECE and their working relationship favourably, highlighting ECE capacity to gain access to and engage with national authorities due to the links forged through intergovernmental bodies, as well as its linguistic and geographical knowledge of countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. However, despite that overall positive assessment, staff surveyed identified the private sector as the main group with which ECE needed to improve its engagement in order to support member States in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals. Similarly, in interviews, the private sector was identified as the stakeholder group with which ECE had insufficient engagement. On the Sustainable Development Goals in particular, some initial steps have been taken, such as the creation of a task force of the Business Advisory Board on public-private partnerships to explore ways to mobilize the private sector behind the Goals.

V. Conclusion

53. Since its creation almost seven decades ago, ECE has provided a neutral space for policy dialogue and decision-making among its member countries and has

[29] The environmental performance reviews, one of the ECE country assessments, was mentioned in the synthesis report of the Secretary-General on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda (A/69/700). Other country assessments are the innovation performance reviews and the country profiles on housing and land management.

effectively convened technical experts and facilitated consensus on a large and varied body of normative products. ECE has also withstood changes in the geopolitical landscape, including the arrival of other pan-regional entities, such as the European Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the rapid enlargement of its membership base in the 1990s, which subsequently increased its activities in the technical cooperation realm.

54. Within a constrained resource environment, ECE will need to reflect on how it can most efficiently and effectively balance its three interrelated core functions, namely policy dialogue, normative work and technical cooperation, in order to add the most value to the member countries that it supports. In doing so, it will need to address certain critical issues regarding its future direction. While ECE has been recognized for its capacity to effectively facilitate the development of legally binding regulations, norms and standards, its policy role has been less prominent, and it will need to strengthen its support for the implementation of those regulations, norms and standards to further enhance its impact. ECE will also need to reflect on how it can best balance its regional focus with the further globalization of its activities and services, including the recent global opening of some of its conventions. ECE must be strategic in leveraging its partnerships, both within and beyond the United Nations system, to complement its own capacity and expertise.

55. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development comes at a critical juncture for ECE. It is both an opportunity to undergo a process of reflection on the issues posed above, as well as an occasion to demonstrate how the work that it has produced in the past seven decades has had a bearing on sustainable development and can be further leveraged to help to implement and monitor a broad and complex global development agenda.

VI. Recommendations

56. OIOS makes five important recommendations to ECE.

Recommendation 1 (result C)

57. **The ECE secretariat should develop and operationalize a knowledge management strategy that addresses how institutional knowledge and expertise will be captured, stored, shared and integrated into its work programme and activities**. In particular, the strategy should address the risk of losing institutional knowledge anticipated with staff departures, as discussed in the present report, and build upon existing organizational guidelines for knowledge sharing.

Indicator of achievement: Knowledge management strategy with target dates for implementation of each subprogramme.

Recommendation 2 (result C)

58. **The ECE secretariat should conduct a mapping of intersectoral and interdivisional initiatives and activities in order to identify opportunities to strengthen the linkages and collaboration between its main functions and subprogrammes**. This exercise could include an assessment of the main challenges and opportunities in enhancing the cross-cutting nature of its work.

Indicator of achievement: Options for strengthening intersectoral and interdivisional initiatives and activities presented and endorsed by the Executive Committee.

Recommendation 3 (result E)

59. **The ECE secretariat should develop a proposal, for presentation to the Executive Committee, that explores the nature of its global focus, including both possible advantages and disadvantages to extending its worldwide reach**. Given that a large proportion of ECE products are currently being used by a global audience, the proposal will facilitate discussion among member States regarding a strategic long-term vision for the regional and global role of ECE. The proposal should explore resource mobilization and partnership alternatives that will allow ECE to adequately respond to global demands in future.

Indicator of achievement: Proposal discussed at the Executive Committee with a clear strategic vision outlined for ECE global focus.

Recommendation 4 (result F)

60. **The ECE secretariat should examine how its activities under existing norms, standards, conventions and related review mechanisms and statistical work can contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals**. In particular, methodologies for the country assessments will need to be adjusted. The tools identified by ECE should be incorporated into its overall strategy and workplan for its work in supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Indicator of achievement: Within each subprogramme, review mechanisms and methodologies adjusted in line with the ECE overall strategy and workplan for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Recommendation 5 (result F)

61. **The ECE secretariat should undertake a mapping of existing partnerships and cooperation with non-State actors and develop specific proposals for expanding and strengthening such cooperation in support of the Sustainable Development Goals**. ECE has established various partnerships within its sectors of work and has been lauded as a strong partner. In seeking to support the ambitious targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ECE will need to draw on current partnerships and forge new ones, including with more non-State actors.

Indicator of achievement: Current and prospective partnerships are mapped with proposals for strengthening cooperation in support of the Sustainable Development Goals presented for consideration at the Executive Committee.

(*Signed*) Heidi **Mendoza**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services
11 January 2017

Annex*

Formal comments provided by the Economic Commission for Europe

1. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) wishes to thank the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) for giving ECE an opportunity to review and comment on the draft report of OIOS on the programme evaluation of ECE.

2. This evaluation represents an important opportunity for ECE to improve its operations. ECE appreciates the commitment of OIOS to organizational learning and performance improvement.

3. ECE also thanks OIOS for the opportunity to provide comments on the previous draft reports. ECE has studied the final draft carefully and welcomes its findings and recommendations. To implement the recommendations within a reasonable time frame, ECE has agreed on an action plan outlining actions to be taken by the end of 2016.

4. ECE concurs with the recommendations in the report and would like to share its overall perspective on them.

Recommendation 1: The nature of the work of ECE, supporting several intergovernmental bodies covering different thematic areas as well as a high number of related subsidiary bodies, has facilitated the development and sharing of knowledge within the region and beyond. ECE concurs with OIOS that the technical expertise generated by ECE risks being lost if no knowledge management mechanisms are created. In line with previous recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit addressed to regional commissions, ECE has already started to develop knowledge management mechanisms to capture and store technical knowledge generated by the organization over the years.

Recommendation 2: In the light of the intersectoral and interdisciplinary nature of the work for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the ECE secretariat has already emphasized the importance of working across thematic boundaries and has started the mapping of its interdivisional and intersectoral activities, in order to identify further opportunities to strengthen the linkages and collaboration between its main functions and subprogrammes. Moreover, as part of its 2016-2017 evaluation workplan, the ECE secretariat plans to undertake a review of ECE efforts to promote cross-sectoral collaboration and an integrated approach to sustainable development work.

Recommendation 3: The evaluation recognizes that a large proportion of ECE products are currently being used worldwide and that this has been the subject of discussion within ECE and beyond. ECE recognizes the need for this issue to be addressed, to explore alternatives to allow ECE to respond to demands beyond its region. It should, however, be noted that this discussion cannot be undertaken by

* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) presents the full text of comments from the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) on the report of OIOS on the evaluation of ECE. This practice has been instituted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

ECE alone, it needs to be further discussed with other organizations and most notably with the other regional commissions, and with the full involvement of their membership. It is ultimately not up to ECE to decide which of its products mandates should be formally recognized as being global. This should be decided by the Economic and Social Council, as well as by treaty and convention bodies. In this context, and with the aim to foster dialogue on this issue, the ECE secretariat will map activities and results which have worldwide dissemination. On the basis of this mapping, ECE will seek the advice of the Executive Committee and/or the Commission on how to proceed further.

Recommendation 4. As noted in the evaluation report, on several occasions ECE has discussed the opportunities presented by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, given that its work covers many of the areas addressed by the Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, sectoral bodies have contributed and are contributing with initiatives and different activities to the development of the Sustainable Development Goals and their implementation. As a consequence, and in line with this recommendation, several subprogrammes and conventions have already started to examine how their work can be further aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. ECE will continue to pay due attention to this work.

Recommendation 5. As noted in the evaluation report, ECE has already established various partnerships within its sectoral work and has been lauded as a strong partner. ECE concurs with the recommendation that, to strengthen its contribution to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the ECE secretariat should map existing partnerships and cooperation with non-State actors and develop specific proposals for expanding and strengthening such cooperation.

5. ECE again emphasizes that it appreciates the analysis and recommendations in the evaluation and the opportunity that it provides to further improve the work of ECE.